SPAWN

THE DARK AGES

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Image

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DIGITAL EDITION

Todd McFarlane & Image Comics Presents

Devil's Knight

Dedicated to Christina McCormack-Sharp

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SPAWN® THE DARK AGES

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THIS IS A DARK STORY.
A STORY BOTH TERRIBLE AND SAD.
OF BLACK DEEDS...
GREAT SACRIFICES... AND TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES.
I HAVE TRAVELED FAR AND WIDE IN MY TIME, I HAVE VISITED MANY LANDS.
AND SEEN MANY THINGS.
I HAVE TRADED MANY A TALE BY FIRELIGHT, COAXED MANY A STORY FROM FELLOW TRAVELLERS...
FROM THE HUMBLEST ALE HOUSE TO THE GRANDEST COURT.
BUT THE STORY I BRING YOU HERE, TONIGHT, IS A STORY LIKE NO OTHER.

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AHEM EXCUSE ME A MOMENT WHILE I SLAKE MY THIRST...
THANK YOU. A DRY THROAT YIELDS A DRY TALE. NOW, THEN, WHERE WAS I..?
AH, YES... AS I SAID, THIS IS A DARK TALE. AND ONE I IMAGINE YOU WILL FIND MOST *FANTASTICAL*
BUT *PLEASE*, KIND LORDS AND LADIES, KNOW THIS, GOOD AS MY WORD, EVERY SPECK OF IT IS ***TRUE.***
IT BEGINS ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS, WHEN THE *MOON* IS HIGH IN THE HEAVENS AND THE SHARP WINDS *HOWL* LIKE WOLVES AT THE DOOR...

WHEN THE GRAVEYARDS CAST OPEN THEIR STONY JAWS AND THE DEVIL WALKS THE ROAD.
ON SUCH A NIGHT, WHO CAN SAY WHAT ACCURSED THING HELL MIGHT SPIT OUT UPON THIS WORLD?
A CREATURE... A MAN... BUT SOMEHOW LESS THAN HUMAN, OR PERHAPS MORE.
HE LAY COILED LIKE A SNAKE ON THE COLD HARD GROUND, UNMOVING.
STILL HALF-FORMED, HE WAS, THIS MISSHAPEN BEAST, FORGED UPON SOME INFERNAL ANVIL.
POSSESSED OF NO MEMORY. NO THOUGHT. ONLY PAIN. PAIN AND HUNGER.
The Devil's Knight

WHAT DARK SLUMBERS HE MUST HAVE KNOWN. WHAT TORTUROUS DREAMS. FRAGMENTS OF A LIFE NOW FORGOTTEN...
FAINT GHOSTS OF MEMORY DANCING ACROSS HIS BRUTISH MIND:
A BRAVE KNIGHT IN A FOREIGN LAND...
A BEAUTIFUL LADY WHO WAITS FOR HIS RETURN...
THE BLOOD OF LEGIONS UPON HIS SWORD...
A VOICE CALLING OUT FROM THE DARKNESS, OFFERING A CRUEL BARGAIN.
AND THROUGH THIS RESTIVE DROWSE. THE HAUNTING CLANG OF SWORDS ECHO THROUGH HIS WEARY SKULL.

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THIS IS THE DEVIL'S WORK, I TELL YOU. WE SHOULD NEVER HAVE AGREED TO THIS DEAL!
SHUT YOUR GOB, PETER, AND PUT YOUR BACK INTO IT. I'M NOT GOING TO DO THIS ALONE.
SKLANG
IT'S HERESY, I TELL YOU!
IT'S BETTER THAN THE SCAFFOLD.
NOW WORK QUICKLY, BOTH OF YOU. RIVALEN WILL FEED US TO THE CROWS IF WE'RE NOT BACK BY SUNRISE.
WAIT. DID YOU JUST HEAR SOMETHING?
I HEAR NOTHING BUT YOUR POXY MOUTH, GILES. IF YOU'RE IN SUCH A HURRY, PUT DOWN THAT LANTERN AND PICK UP A SPADE...
FWAMP

HE STOOD STONE-LIKE IN THE SILVERY WASH OF MOONLIGHT, AN ABOMINATION UNTO ALL THAT'S GODLY...
...HELL'S BLACK KNIGHT!
HIS GREAT CHEST HEAVED, RUMBLING LIKE A BELLOWS... BLOOD RAN IN HOT RIVULETS BETWEEN HIS COLD FINGERS.
AND IN HIS BLACK HEART, ONLY ONE THOUGHT...
"WHAT AM I?"

FOR MANY YEARS, THE VILLAGE OF RHYLL HAD SUFFERED UNDER THE PALL OF HUNGER AND PENURY.
BUT A CHILD IS A CHILD, AND WILL FIND PLAYFUL DIVERSION WHATEVER HIS LOT.
THREE... FOUR... FIVE...
DEVYYN WAS AN ORPHAN, RAISED WITH A STERN HAND BY HIS HALF-SISTER, BRONWYN AND HER HUSBAND, BRAM, THE BARKEEP.
BUT DESPITE THEIR BEST EFFORTS, THE BOY WAS AS WILD AS THE WOODS HE SO LOVED.
TODAY'S SPORT WAS A GAME OF HIDE-AND-SEEK.
WAIT... THERE IT IS!
OOF!
NO NEED TO PROSTRATE YOURSELF, BOY. I'M NOT THE BLOODY POPE!
Huhn?

It was a great oak of a man that stood before the young boy, stout and gnarled and filled with secrets.
His voice rolled like thunder in the distance.
Hullo there, lad. *Looking* for something? Well, so am I, perhaps we might *help* each other.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME, LAD?
I AM CALLED PEVVYN, SIR.
WELL, PEVVYN, CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT FOOL LORD BELONGS TO THAT HEAP OF STONES, YONDER?
N-NO ONE, SIR. I MEAN, IT'S EMPTY, DESERTED, IT IS
'TWAS THE KEEP OF LORD COVENANT, SIR. A'FORE I WAS BORN.
THEY SAY...
THEY SAY IT IS HAUNTED, SIR.
WELL, IF IT'S NOT NOW, IT WILL BE SOON.
HERE YOU GO, BOYO. FOR YOUR TROUBLE. AND YOU NEEDN'T TELL ANYONE OF OUR LITTLE TALK, IF YOU GET MY MEANING. THERE'S A GOOD LAD
WHERE DID YOU GO, PEV? WHERE'D YOU GET THAT APPLE?
CAN I HAVE A BITE?

MANY MILES TO THE EAST, AT THE COURT OF BARON RIVALEN...
THE COMING OF NIGHT BESPOKE OF THE GLOOM THAT CLOUDED THE BARON'S HEART.
RIVALEN WAS NOT A MAN WHO MET DISAPPOINTMENT WITH GOOD GRACE.
WHERE IS HE? WHERE IS DuBLANC? I SEND HIM ON A BOY'S ERRAND, AND IT SEEMS BEYOND HIS KEN!
JUST DAYS PRIOR, RIVALEN HAD STRUCK A BARGAIN.
THREE THIEVES, SENTENCED TO HANG, WERE GRANTED A PARDON. IN RETURN, THEY WERE TO RETRIEVE A MERE "TRINKET" FROM THE GRAVESITE OF A COMMONER, AND BRING IT BACK TO THE BARON.
I HAD A DREAM THAT THE EARTH WAS ROUND, AND EVERYTHING WAS UPSIDE-DOWN... AND SO IT WAS, THE WHOLE WORLD 'ROUND, THAT CLOWN WAS KING AND KING WAS CLOWN!
TWO NIGHTS HAD PASSED, AND THE THIEVES DID NOT RETURN. RIVALEN HAD SENT HIS CAPTAIN OF ARMS TO FIND THEM...

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I HEAR YOU'VE BEEN BARKING FOR ME, MY LORD.
DAMN IT, DuBLANC! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? HAVE YOU FOUND THOSE WRETCHES?
AYE! INDEED I HAVE.
WELL, WHERE ARE THEY?
MEANWHILE, FROM A SHADOWY OTHER-PLACE, THREE STRANGE SISTERS WATCHED ON AS BARON RIVALEN RECEIVED THE NEWS
THE BARON, YOU SEE, HAD MADE OTHER, DARKER BARGAINS.
HE WILL FAIL US, MARK MY WORDS. WE SHOULD FIND A NEW VESSEL.
DO NOT BE SO SURE. RIVALEN IS A DESPERATE MAN.

WELL, THEN, WHERE ARE THEY?
HERE, MILORD.
RIVALEN IS A FOOL.
YES, BUT HE IS OUR FOOL.
AND HE SHALL DANCE TO WHATEVER TUNE WE NAME! THAT, MY SISTERS, YOU CAN COUNT ON.
HOW DARE YOU?! I WANTED THEM RETURNED ALIVE!
THIS IS NOT MY WORK, LORD. I FOUND THEM THUS. THERE'S SOME MISCHIEF AFOOT.
"MISCHIEF?" BY WHOSE HAND?!
I DREAMED THE WORLD WAS STAINED WITH RED, THAT OCEANS WEPT AND GRAVEYARDS BLED. FOR WHEN RETURNS ONE LONG-THOUGHT DEAD... MANY MORE FOOLS SHALL LOSE THEIR HEAD.

FOR THREE NIGHTS NOW, THE FOREST OF RHYLL ECHOED WITH UNEARTHLY SCREAMS OF ANGUISH.
BRUTAL, WILD SCREAMS OF A SORT THAT RATTLED THE HEADSTONES AND SHOOK THE EARTH.
BE WERE THE TERRIBLE CRIES REBIRTH.
SPURRED ON BY THE STEELY LANCES OF MEMORY.
AARRRGH!

A VISION OF HELL FLOODED THE POOR CREATURE'S MIND.
BEHIND HIS EYES, HE COULD SEE THINGS, HEAR THINGS, WE DAREN'T EVEN SPEAK OF.
PILES OF BODIES BUILT UP TO THE HEAVENS IN A FETID, STINKING TOWER. THE CONSTANT, EAR-PIERCING SHRIEKS OF THE DAMNED.
THE ROUGH, CALLUSED FINGERS OF HELL RESHAPING BONE AND FLESH, SEARING SKIN AND BOILING BLOOD.
THE NOISOME FLAMES OF PERDITION SCORCHING AWAY EVERY TRACE OF HUMANITY.
AN ENDLESS, WAKING NIGHTMARE, FROM WHICH THERE IS NO ESCAPE.

AT THE VILLAGE ALE HOUSE, THE MAD HOWLING DID NOT GO UNNOTICED.
IT IS AN *UNHOLY* THING THAT SCREAMS LIKE THIS. MARK MY WORDS, THE DEVIL'S ON THE LOOSE TONIGHT.
'TIS NOTHING BUT THE ***WOLVES,*** BRAM. AND MARK *MY* WORDS· SOON THEY WILL BE AT OUR DOOR.
THERE'S HARSH WINTER AHEAD OF US, MADE HARSHER STILL BY THAT DAMNED RIVALEN AND HIS TAXES.
THERE IT IS AGAIN!
EVER SINCE LORD COVENANT LEFT TO GO FIGHT THE POPE'S WAR, THIS SHIRE HAS SEEN NOTHING BUT BAD LUCK. MAY HE BE *CURSED* FOR ABANDONING HIS PEOPLE!
HUSH NOW, OSTLER. DON'T SPEAK ILL OF THE ***DEAD.*** COVENANT WAS A *GOOD* MAN. GOD KEEP HIS SOUL.
UPSTAIRS, THE YOUNG BOY GAZED AT HIS SIMPLE TREASURE AS IF IT HELD THE KEYS OF UNTOLD FORTUNE.
PERHAPS THE APPLE WAS MAGIC AND A SINGLE BITE WOULD CAST A SPELL ON HIM.
PERHAPS IT WOULD PLACE HIM UNDER A ***GEIS,*** SET HIM ON THE ROAD TO SOME GREAT ***ADVENTURE.***
BUT, IN HIS HEART, HE KNEW THIS WAS NONSENSE. HE WAS JUST A POOR COUNTRY BOY, AND HIS DREAMS WOULD GROW STUNTED AND DIE IN A TOWN LIKE RHYLL.
THERE WAS NO ADVENTURE TO BE FOUND HERE.
BUT JUST THEN, PEVVYN HEARD THE THUNDERING OF HOOVES COMING DOWN THE ROAD.

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING ILLUMINATED THE RIDERS. BUT EVEN IN THE DARK, PEVVYN WOULD HAVE RECOGNIZED THE ONE IN FRONT.
GUY DuBLANC... RIVALEN'S CAPTAIN-AT-ARMS. A VAIN AND CRUEL MAN, HANDSOME AS THE DEVIL HIMSELF.
HE TOOK WICKED PLEASURE IN DOING THE BARON'S ORDERS, WHETHER IT WAS BEATING TAXES OUT OF THE STARVING OR TORCHING THE HOMES OF THOSE WHO SPOKE AGAINST HIM.
QUIT *LAGGING*, MEN! WHOEVER DARE LAY HANDS ON THE BARON'S CHARGES WILL ANSWER TO ME.

LOOK, FELLOWS! A NEST OF *RATS!*
LISTEN CLOSELY. THERE HAS BEEN SOME BAD BUSINESS 'ROUND THIS SHIRE. THREE MEN WERE MURDERED IN THE GRAVEYARD YESTER-NIGHT.
I SHALL KNOW WHO DID THIS CRIME AND I SHALL KNOW *NOW.*
THIS IS A PEACEABLE HOUSE, MILORD. PLEASE, LEAVE YOUR WEAPONS OUTSIDE. WE'LL NOT HAVE ANY TROUBLE HERE.
TCH-TCH. SUCH RUDENESS. IS *THIS* THE KIND OF HOSPITALITY YOU SHOW YOUR *BETTERS?* WHAT SAY YOU, LASS?
COME, LET ME WARM MY HANDS.
REMOVE YOUR FILTHY FRENCH PAWS FROM HER, DuBLANC!
AND WHO ARE YOU, THAT DARES SPEAK TO ME THUS?
I AM A FREE BORN ENGLISHMAN, WHO'S HAD A BELLYFUL OF YOU AND RIVALEN. WE WORK OURSELVES TO THE BONE SO THAT YOU MAY GROW FAT ON OUR TOIL.
TAKE YOUR SEARCH ELSEWHERE. THERE ARE NO MURDERERS HERE. NONE SAVE THOSE YOU BROUGHT WITH YOU.
YOU ARE TOO BOLD, YOU UGLY YARD-COCK.
IT'S BOLDNESS BORN OF *SUFFERING,* DuBLANC. SUFFERING AT THE HANDS OF YOU AND YOUR ***LEASH-KEEPER!***
WELL, MY DEAR FRIEND, IF THIS COARSE LIFE OF YOURS, IS SUCH A BURDEN, PERHAPS IT IS BEST THAT I FREE YOU FROM IT'S YOKE.

THE NIGHT EXPLODED IN A VIOLENT STORM OF CRIMSON AND BLACK.
IN THE SPAN OF THREE BEATS OF A PANICKED HEART, THE BARON'S MEN WERE DISPATCHED BY THE UNLEASHED FURY OF THIS DREAD BLACK KNIGHT!
AAAEE!
WUF!
NOOO!
AND AS SUDDENLY AS IT BEGAN, IT WAS OVER

And then all was still.
DuBlanc's pretty face was split to the bone, his comrades in arms lying slumped in lifeless heaps on the ground.
The creature stood frozen for a moment, and stared at DuBlanc with cold dead eyes.
NO... NO..... NOOO!
Then the beast ran out into the harsh needles of icy rain, and in a single, great bound, leapt upon DuBlanc's own stallion, and charged into the night.

On and on he spurred the beast, till steam rose up off its back. Led by instinct, by memory, or perhaps by something that can't be named...
The black knight headed out of the village, out past the edge of the forest, and then he stopped. He looked and saw the ruins of a great keep rising up in front of him.
The ancient timbers quaked beneath his weight as he entered, his footsteps echoing off the crumbling stone walls.
Once a great castle, it was now weed-choked and fire-scarred.
Something deep within him stirred with dread and recognition. As he bounded up the steps to what was once the great hall...
Somehow, some part of him knew exactly where he was...

WELL, IT'S ABOUT *TIME!* I WAS BEGINNING TO THINK YOU WEREN'T *EVER* GOING TO SHOW UP.
WELCOME HOME, HELLSPAWN!
To Be Continued

Darkness